



Dear Neighbor:

There's no better reflection of what's important to us than where we choose to put our resources. That's true in our families – and it's just as true about our community.

You elect those of us who serve on the County Council to make choices about how our tax dollars are spent – and to make sure they get spent

responsibly and effectively.

When we approve a budget, we're not just toting up numbers on a page. We are literally mapping our future as a county.

Montgomery County is a great place to live, raise a family, and earn a living. It is truly a place of opportunity, as witnessed by those who move here from around the nation or even from other countries – drawn by our excellent school system, our economic opportunities, and our quality of life.

But we can't rest on our laurels.

Our schools face new challenges as they add several thousand children a year and deal with the special needs of many students.

Affordable housing for working families is in short supply as property prices and rents continue to rise.

Continuing traffic congestion keeps us on the road longer and demands common-sense approaches to give all of us more transportation options without making sprawl worse.

And we need to continue to balance growth and development in a way that preserves the qualities that make our County unique in the metro area.

These are the challenges before us as a County. We have matched our needs with our resources and approved a budget for the fiscal year starting July 1 that makes the hard choices – and the right choices – *without* increasing taxes:

- Our kids are our future. That's why we've invested \$15 million more than the County Executive requested to reduce class size, expand all-day kindergarten, and strengthen skills for our teachers.

- Traffic congestion frustrates many Montgomery families. That's why we are continuing our balanced transportation strategy of road, intersection, and mass transit improvements. A new \$1 million initiative will increase mass transit incentives. Construction continues on Norbeck Road Extended, which ultimately will give us four lanes all the way from Rockville to I-95. *See our foldout map for details.*
- Our parks, trails, and ballfields contribute enormously to the quality of life we cherish. We've restored \$2.6 million to the budget to renovate and maintain more ballfields, preserve our trails, and keep our recreation centers bustling with activity.
- We owe a lot to the seniors who built this County. That's why we've committed nearly \$1 million for transportation for seniors and disabled adults.
- The Council continued to support affordable housing and revitalizing aging neighborhoods. We allocated \$15 million for the Montgomery Housing Initiative – doubling last year's funding.
- Montgomery College plays a key role in turning out the educated work force we need in the "new economy." We've made sure it has the tools it needs by giving the College \$3 million more than the County Executive proposed.
- Public safety is a critical responsibility of local government. We funded new technology to improve public safety response time, productivity, and coordination. We expanded our red light photo enforcement program. We are putting a victim assistance worker in each police district station. And we are strengthening our domestic violence efforts.
- We are helping the most vulnerable among us – expanding our response to homelessness and our growing mental health crisis and advancing our Early Childhood Initiative to be sure children get what they need in the pre-school years.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to carry on this important work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Blair G. Ewing".

Blair G. Ewing
Council President

Council Targets Red-Light Runners, Boosts Public Safety

In a county where pedestrian fatalities outnumber homicides, the Council is stepping up its work to deter red light runners —and strengthening public safety efforts across the board.

The budget for this year expands the red-light photo enforcement campaign by adding 15 new cameras rotated among 20 new intersections, bringing the total to 25 cameras at 35 of the County's most dangerous intersections.

"Over the past two years, more than 50,000 people have been ticketed for running red lights at only 15 intersections among the 700 intersections in the county with signals," said Councilmember Phil Andrews, who chairs the Public Safety Committee. "Red light running is dangerous and reckless behavior that puts all of us at risk. More cameras can help deter red light runners."

Working with the Department of Correction and Rehabilitation, the Council saved \$510,000 in costs for the new Clarksburg jail. The Council funded the \$1.1 million Integrated Justice Information System to improve coordination among public safety agencies and bolster criminal prosecutions.



Councilmember Phil Andrews with victims of red light runners.

The Council continued its focus on battling domestic violence in the County by funding an increase in safety check-ups with domestic violence victims by the Sheriff's office. Other additions include full-time victim assistance staff in all five district police stations and medical rescue units in the Gaithersburg and Hillandale areas.

Up County Gains in Budget

The fastest-growing area in the County — the Up County — got additional respect from the Council during the budget season.

"Thanks to Council action, we'll have the \$25 million to design and build Clarksburg Middle School 44431 by September 2004," said Councilmember Nancy Dacek, who represents the Up County. "We are going to have 40,000 people living in Clarksburg

and we have to be ready."

Dacek also praised Council approval of \$500,000 for the Black Rock Arts Center in Germantown, a \$500,000 increase for Olney Theatre, more staff for the new Quince Orchard Library, and funds to expand the Children's Room at Gaithersburg library.

At its first ever Town Hall meeting in Poolesville in April, the Council



Councilmember Nancy Dacek

affirmed its unanimous opposition to a so-called "Techway" that would either hurt established neighborhoods in Darnestown, Potomac, and North Potomac or slash through the County's nationally acclaimed Agricultural Reserve. The County Executive and the Governor also oppose the project.

"We need common-sense approaches to relieve congestion and fight sprawl that are consistent with preserving our neighborhoods and green spaces," said Dacek. "The so-called 'Techway' would cost a lot of money, do a lot of harm, and give us little, if any, congestion relief. It doesn't make the cut."

Keeping Montgomery County Green

Ask any Montgomery Countian about the quality of life in the County and the conversation will turn to the County's parks and green space.

At 28,000 acres, the County parks system needs lots of tending. That's why the Council was concerned that parks were being shortchanged in the proposed budget – and acted to remedy that oversight.

“When it comes time to ‘play ball’ of whatever sort, our families are used to and deserve to have good ball fields to play on,” said Councilmember Howard Denis. “We are putting \$740,000 back in the budget to renovate fields and to keep them in fine shape.”

The Council also worked to keep Legacy Open Space on track. This is a six-year, \$33 million effort to preserve for future generations significant environmental, urban, and historic open spaces. The first two purchases have already been made: Bucklodge Forest in Boyds and Sligo Mill in Takoma Park.



Councilmember Howard Denis

\$1 Million Boost for Mass Transit Adds to Balanced Council Approach

The Council's efforts to give County commuters more transportation options received a shot in the arm with approval of a new \$1 million initiative to encourage mass transit use.

Following up on a Council-initiated survey of commuters who drive to work alone, Councilmember Steve Silverman won approval of a program to increase incentives to public and private employers whose employees get to work without driving alone. About 74 companies and 3,000 employees in high-traffic congestion areas participate in the “Fare Share” program. The initiative will also explore running free bus service into high-density areas.

“Everybody talks about the big controversial transportation projects,” said Councilmember Silverman. “Even if some are a good idea, they are years and years away. We need to provide additional traffic

congestion relief now so people can spend less time on the road and more time with their families.

“That's why we're building Norbeck Road Extended right now, which will eventually give us four lanes all the way from Rockville to I-95 to help with east-west traffic. And that's why we need to boost mass transit with these incentives – for areas like Bethesda, Friendship Heights, and Route 29, where new roads aren't an option.”

The Council continued the 44 percent decrease in fares for two-week and 20-trip Ride-On bus passes. The fare reduction also already has resulted in a ten-percent jump in ridership, which totals 22 million trips annually.



Councilmember Steve Silverman

“When more people use mass transit, we all win – even if our personal situation might not let us do so,” said Councilmember Silverman. “That's because it takes more cars off the road.”

Check out our map on upcoming transportation improvements in the centerfold of this newsletter.

Seniors, Council Work Together To Meet Special Needs

Seniors are the fastest-growing group in Montgomery County. They put down roots and raised families here. They made the County what it is today. And they want to keep on contributing.

“When we talked with seniors about what they needed, transportation was right at the top of the list,” said Councilmember Isiah Leggett. “That’s why we’ve included almost \$1 million in transportation assistance for seniors and disabled adults with a special emphasis on excorted transportation.”

But the Council didn’t stop there. Also approved was a program to train seniors as geriatric nurse assistants. And the Council included money to monitor adult foster care homes and expand chore services and respite care.

“Affordable senior housing also is a big need,” said Leggett. “We must work with our partners in the private sector to find appropriate sites for senior housing, as well as making it possible for more seniors to stay in their current homes.”



Councilmember Isiah Leggett

Council Invests in Health and Human Services

Montgomery County may boast one of the highest per-capita incomes in the country, but the proverbial rising tide hasn’t lifted all of our boats.

“That’s why the County Council is working to strengthen services to the most vulnerable County residents,” said Councilmember Marilyn Praisner, a member of the Council’s Health and Human Services Committee. “People depend on us for effective and timely assistance.

“Our Early Childhood Initiative is a great example,” said Praisner. “The Early Childhood Initiative will reach out to parents to be sure that pre-school children get the support and stimulation they need to be healthy and ready to learn once they reach school age.”

The program builds on the Montgomery Babies program to make sure all babies born in County hospitals get a healthy start, initiated by the County at Councilmember Praisner’s urging.

While the state government has lagged in its responsibility to adequately fund mental health needs, the Council has stepped in, short term, to fill the gap.



Councilmember Marilyn Praisner

The budget contains \$745,000 more to address the mounting mental health crisis, including support for private mental health clinics serving public patients.

The Council also expanded services for the homeless at the new Men’s Emergency Shelter, increased the hours of operation of the Mobile Crisis Team, and put more resources into case management to address the challenges faced by the homeless as they seek to regain self-sufficiency.

The County is addressing the significant gap in the infant mortality rate between white and African American babies by continuing funding for the African American Health Initiative, which also targets issues of oral health, HIV/AIDS, and diabetes. The Council also funded development of a Latino health initiative.



Councilmember Michael Subin

Council Makes Schools Top Budget Priority

The Montgomery County Public Schools was the big winner in this year's budget as the County Council added \$15.1 million to the Executive's proposed budget to fund

class size reduction, teacher development, and more all-day kindergarten.

"Maintaining—and improving—our public education system is the linchpin for everything else good in this county," said Councilmember Michael Subin, who chairs the Council's Education Committee. "We're expecting 3,500 more students next fall. With a more diverse student body, we now have almost one in four students eligible for free or reduced meals. Many more students speak a first language other than English.

"We have to meet these challenges and ensure that every single student has the opportunity to go as far as their energy and talents and intellect will take them.

"That's why the whole Council put our schools at the top of the list."

The budget included:

- \$10.8 million more – for a total of \$28 million—for class size reductions at all levels, including all-day kindergarten at 11 more schools for a total of 28 schools, K-2 reduction to 17 students per teacher at 19 additional schools for a total of 38 schools.
- \$3 million more – for a total of \$35 million – for teacher professional development programs.
- \$2 million more – for a total of \$14 million – to continue expansion of reading and math literacy programs.
- \$2.3 million more to improve special education.
- \$63,000 increase – to nearly \$540,000 – for our pioneering Linkages to Learning program. It brings needed social services into the schools and will be expanded to five additional locations, with more programming at existing sites.

\$15 Million Approved By Council To Promote Affordable Housing

With housing prices and rents rising, decent places to live at affordable prices are scarce. Many people who work in Montgomery County can't afford to live here, resulting in longer commutes and more traffic congestion.

That's why the County Council approved an all-time high of \$15 million for the Montgomery Housing Initiative Fund. The fund, established in 1989, provides loans to build, acquire, and preserve affordable housing and revitalize older County neighborhoods. It also assists first-time homebuyers.

"This is a great boost to our County's ongoing efforts to promote affordable housing for Montgomery

County families," said Council member Derick Berlage, chair of the Planning, Housing, and Economic Development Committee.

"Our Housing Opportunities Commission can purchase new moderately-priced units. We'll have the resources to preserve existing affordable housing. Plus, we can work with landlords and tenants groups to renovate aging properties and give new life to our older neighborhoods such as those in Silver Spring, Wheaton, and Takoma Park."



Councilmember Derick Berlage

For more details...

Check out your County Council on the Web and on TV

Get more details on the County budget, the County Council, and all issues that affect your family. Check out the Council on the Web at www.co.mo.md.us/council.

On County Cable Montgomery (channel 6), you'll find full broadcasts of County Council sessions, plus many public hearings, neighborhood Town Hall meetings, and other feature programming. Check out the schedule listed on the Council website.

And now – **it's new** – you can tune into County Cable Montgomery through the Internet—even if you don't have cable TV! Just go to www.co.mo.md.us/council and click on the **CCM Online Video icon or the Live Audio/Video link** for live coverage of Council sessions, public hearings, and more.



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Inside . . .

A budget that makes the right choices
for Montgomery . . .

Plus a comprehensive
CENTERFOLD map of transportation
improvements in the works!



**News From Your
County Council**



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Steven Silverman
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